

VZCZCXRO4800
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHSR
DE RUEHROV #0032 0861007
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 261007Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0928
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0962

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000032

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/26/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS AT CENTER OF HOLY SEE DIPLOMACY

CLASSIFIED BY: Chris Sandrolini, DCM.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Summary: The belief that all people are created by God with equal dignity and worth is at the core of the Holy See's promotion of human rights. The Holy See's human rights foreign policy aims to assure that the inherent dignity of the human person is guaranteed by law. The UN and other multilateral institutions provide a forum to advance this policy. While the Holy See will generally not openly criticize specific countries for violating human rights, Vatican officials underline that the Holy See privately addresses the issue with culprit governments bilaterally. For the Holy See, the United States' preeminent status on the world stage translates into a greater level of responsibility for upholding all human rights, including those regarding torture. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) Poloffs met with Monsignor Christophe El-Kassis on Tuesday, February 26, for a general discussion on human rights. El-Kassis is the Holy See's Secretariat of State point person for multilateral institutions and organizations dealing with international human rights.

Torture and Freedom

[¶3.](#) (C) El-Kassis maintained that for the Holy See there is no hierarchy of rights: all human rights are equally important. He credited the United States for its leading role in the promotion of human rights, and in this sense underlined the importance of the US unambiguously standing against all forms of torture. Poloff reassured him that the USG does indeed oppose all forms of torture.

[¶4.](#) (C) El-Kassis stated that the Holy See's special concern for religious freedom does not mean that it takes this right to be more important than others. He implied, however, that religious freedom serves as a good indicator for a country's overall respect for human rights, a view that is consistent with that presented by the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, in a speech on "The protection of the right of religious freedom in the current work of the Holy See" delivered at the Santa Croce University in Rome on January [¶10.](#)

UN role

[¶4.](#) (C) El-Kassis underlined the importance of supporting the U.N. in promoting and protecting human rights, despite shortcomings in the work of institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council. In terms of calling attention to the human rights record of specific countries -- through the UN or bilaterally -- El-Kassis quoted the New Testament in defending the Holy See's bias for quiet diplomacy: "if your brother does something wrong you tell him in private". He noted, however, that abstaining from more overt criticism of specific countries' records should not call into question the Holy See's commitment

to human rights.

US Elections

17. (C) El-Kassis was very interested in US politics and the upcoming presidential election. He asked about the impact the elections could have on US human rights policy and on issues such as legislation on abortion and same-sex marriages. Poloff answered that the US commitment to human rights, much like the Holy See's, is deeply rooted in fundamental values, and that these values define us as a nation and will not change as a result of the elections.

Comment

18. (SBU) The Holy See shares with the USG a sense of moral duty to promote and protect human rights, and appreciates the leading role the USG plays in advancing this goal. Holy See officials routinely refer to the Department's human rights and religious freedom reports as authoritative sources of information and useful advocacy tools in their own dealings with foreign governments. Holy See officials like to point out that, even if we sometimes differ in strategies, our human rights goals are the same.

19. (U) Post will continue to work with the Holy See in the promotion of human rights, including through the organization of a series of conferences with the participation of Holy See officials to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention. These conferences will also underline the friendship between the United States and the Holy See on the upcoming 25th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations.

GLENDON